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ABSTRACT

The "controlling statement," a method of teaching students to write in an organized and efficient manner, consists of three basic parts: the idea, the viewpoint, and the key terms. Once introduced to students, these three parts can be easily used throughout the year (or years) to refer to basic areas within the composition process. This method of composition stresses practice, refinement, and more practice as the levels of difficulty increase. It begins with a single paragraph assignment that introduces the idea of the controlling statement and its three parts. Developing an idea into several paragraphs is the second phase of the composition program. At this point, the introductory paragraph becomes the controlling statement, and each of the key terms becomes a paragraph of its own. When students are comfortable writing with the controlling statement, they can be taught the value and use of an outline to coordinate with it. Next, the same technique can be applied to answering an essay question. A term paper is the culmination of the composition sequence. The final benefit of this teaching method is that it gives objective criteria for evaluating student writing. (JL)

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COMPOSITION WITH A CONTROLLING STATEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Reading and writing become increasingly important as a student progresses through school. The older the student, the more these two components become the core to a complete Language Arts and Communication Arts program.

A clearly expressed, well organized composition is a necessary means to an end. If a student can be taught the basic components of the controlling statement, he can then begin to express himself clearly in a well organized, written form, whether it be for a paragraph, a multi-paragraph paper, an answer to an essay question, or a term paper.

Although there are many types of writing, the controlling statement is best used for expository or opinion papers rather than for creative or narrative writing.

It is my hope that this method of teaching a unified and organized composition will be helpful in your classroom. This method, when taken slowly and specifically step by step, can produce satisfying results for the teacher as well as the student, even though the student may have limited ability and inclination for writing.

THE CONTROLLING STATEMENT

The controlling statement, a method of teaching students to write in an organized and efficient manner, is called the "controlling statement" because it "controls" the organization and direction of the student's writing.

There are three basic parts to the controlling statement:

The Idea	(the subject or topic)
The Viewpoint	(what the student has to say about the subject)
The Key Terms	(the reasons or the support to go with the IDEA and the VIEWPOINT)
	these are frequently called "becauses" by the students

These three terms, once introduced to the students, are easily used throughout the year (or years) to refer to basic areas within the composition process. The progression of writing as I have explained here could effectively cover a two or a three year sequential program. The time is an important factor because this method of composition needs practice, refinement, and more practice as the levels of difficulty increase. There is also the factor that students must be taught other areas of study in an English or Language Arts class along with composition.

THE SINGLE PARAGRAPH

The introduction of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT to the students, will take some time. The initial paragraph will probably take four or five days. The first day is primarily the explanation and practice of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT. The second day the actual assignment is given, but in a restricted manner, so that the second, third, and fourth days are related to completing this paragraph.

At the point of introduction, it is important to explain clearly the three parts of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT. I have found that several approaches can be used and should be alternated to make the explanation go more smoothly. The chalkboard or an overhead transparency (See Figure 1.) can be used in the initial step. Because students find it difficult to remember an explanation of new material simply by seeing and listening, it reinforces the learning process if they take notes on the information. In that way they can refer to the basic form if they have difficulty in remembering from one assignment to another.

On the first day of instruction in the CONTROLLING STATEMENT, the second step is practice. Place a randomly selected topic, on the chalkboard and ask students to supply a few VIEWPOINTS. Taking each VIEWPOINT separately, students are asked to supply the missing KEY TERMS.

Example:

Dogs ⟶ make good pets ⟶ because they are friendly
⟶ because they provide comparionship
⟶ because they are fun to play with

Dogs ⟶ are useful ⟶ because they protect people
⟶ because they help people
⟶ because they provide companionship

Other possible ideas: Cats
School
Parents
A bicycle
A tree

The third step, still on the first day, is to have students practice individually in the same manner that the group just practiced as a class. On notebook paper the students can complete a CONTROLLING STATEMENT as a topic is given. As the students complete their CONTROLLING STATEMENT, they can read them out loud. A brief discussion may follow where students are asked if a statement just read is accurately written according to directions. If the class agrees that the form is correct, another student may read his. If the class does not agree that the form is correct, the students may explain how the statement could be corrected. This process can continue until all students have participated in the discussion in some way. If the class or specific individuals have difficulty at this point, additional practice may be required.

There are two common areas of difficulty that beginning students may have in the early stages of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT. First, and perhaps the more common of the two, is the use of very vague or nonspecific words in the VIEWPOINT.

Example:

Summer ⟶ is <u>nice</u> ⟶ because the weather is nice
because there is no school
because I can <u>goof</u> around

Students have difficulty at this point because they are unsure of what they really intend or want to say. As a result, try to discourage the use of such words as 'nice', 'good', and 'bad'. If the students have a more clearly defined IDEA of where they are headed, they will write KEY TERMS that will not overlap, thus avoiding discouragement and frustration when they can't really explain their IDEA.

Example:

Summer ⟶ is my favorite season ⟶
because the weather is nice
because there is no school
because the weather is warm

You will notice the overlap of the first and third KEY TERMS. The best way to explain this is to ask the student if he can explain how "Summer is my favorite season of the year because the weather is nice" and "Summer is my favorite season of the year because the weather is warm" differ; how he plans to explain or provide detail so that these two KEY TERMS do not say essentially the same thing. When the student cannot explain, he may decide to change one of the two. If the student can explain and does so adequately, then he can proceed to work on word choice and suitability.

The second day the actual assignment is given. Students review the three basic parts from yesterday: IDEA (topic), VIEWPOINT (what is said about the topic), and the KEY TERMS (the reasons or "becauses" to go with the first part). The CONTROLLING STATEMENT becomes the topic sentence of the paragraph. (See Figure 2.) The explanation of the first 'because' (KEY TERM #1), the explanation of the second 'because' (KEY TERM #2), and the explanation of the third 'because' (KEY TERM #3), and so on forms the body of the paragraph. From that point, the students rewrite the CONTROLLING STATEMENT, listing the KEY TERMS first: They then have a simple conclusion or summary of the paragraph. (See Figure 3.)

Give the students several options for IDEAS from which to choose. They then may choose their own VIEWPOINT and KEY TERMS (three or four is best at this point) for the CONTROLLING STATEMENT. To guarantee success with this first attempt, it is best to proofread or okay each individual's CONTROLLING STATEMENT. This does not take long, and it provides the teacher with an opportunity to see if each student is headed in the proper direction. It is also a chance to make corrections and explain the overall direction of the paragraph to those students who may need additional help and/or reinforcement for this initial paragraph.

After the paragraph has been completed, the students should proofread their papers for mechanical errors and recopy them into final form.

The next time a paragraph is assigned, the students should again review the basic components of a CONTROLLING STATEMENT. The procedure for the second paragraph is the same as for the first paragraph. In fact, the procedure remains similar until the students can write a paragraph without any specific reference to the CONTROLLING STATEMENT, and the process is almost automatic.

When the CONTROLLING STATEMENT approach to writing a paragraph has become almost automatic, the time is right for replacement or removal of the awkward "becauses". This is done by requiring the "becauses" on the rough draft or initial attempt and putting a line through the word "because" or any other unnecessary repetition to show students that the same components of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT are there, but the awkwardness has been removed.

Example:

Before - Dogs make good pets because they are friendly,
because they provide companionship, and
because they are fun to play with.

After - Dogs made good pets because they are friendly,
they provide companionship, and
they are fun to play with.

THE MULTI-PARAGRAPH PAPER

The second phase of a composition program using the CONTROLLING STATEMENT is to develop this idea into several paragraphs. One of the important factors at this point is to return to the original awkwardness of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT with the inclusion of the "becauses".

The first step is to have the students write a complete CONTROLLING STATEMENT, emphasizing that the "becauses" are to be included. After this has been done, each student is to look at his KEY TERMS and see: 1) that there is no overlap between ideas and 2) if he can write a paragraph with several details on each KEY TERM. After these criteria have been met, the student is ready to continue. (See Figure 4.)

The introductory or opening paragraph of the composition has, temporarily, become the CONTROLLING STATEMENT. Each one of the KEY TERMS, then, becomes a paragraph of its own. The concluding paragraph, temporarily, has become the rewritten CONTROLLING STATEMENT.

An area that seems to give the students the most difficulty when approaching a composition of more than one paragraph is insuring that each individual paragraph has a topic sentence. By being very structured in the beginning this difficulty can be kept to a minimum. The student needs to be guided and directed in such a manner that success is almost automatic. By requiring a student to repeat the IDEA and the VIEWPOINT at the start of each paragraph, adding the specific KEY TERM that follows the sequence of the original CONTROLLING STATEMENT, a topic sentence for each paragraph has been built into the composition. (See Figure 5.)

As composition assignments progress from this initial product, students may -- as ability dictates -- be encouraged to vary the topic sentences slightly. The only possible hazard is that students lose sight of the original topic sentence and omit it rather than vary it.

When students are at ease with this basic procedure for compositions, they may be taken a step further -- expanding the introduction and the conclusion into more than one sentence. The IDEA and the VIEWPOINT can be a sentence alone. The KEY TERMS can be individual sentences that refer to the IDEA and the VIEWPOINT. At this point, much more sophisticated compositions

will occur. Students who have difficulty writing will not have the finesse and sophistication of the above-average students, but they will most certainly have unified and organized compositions. This will show them that they can write and write well enough to communicate correctly with an audience.

OUTLINING THE CONTROLLING STATEMENT

When a student is comfortable writing with the CONTROLLING STATEMENT, he can be taught the value and use of an outline to coordinate with the same CONTROLLING STATEMENT.

The outline will not have a section for an introduction or a Roman numeral. The "becauses" are the Roman numerals of the outline or the body of the paper. The conclusion, will not have a section or a Roman numeral either.

If the composition assignment was a single paragraph, the outline has a single Roman numeral, the IDEA and the VIEWPOINT. The KEY TERMS then become the subtopics with capital letters. (Refer back to Figure 2.)

Example:

I. Summer is my favorite season
   A. Outdoor sports
   B. Vacation travel
   C. Free time

The students can then be taught that additional details are very important and that they also have a place in the outline. Outdoor sports, a subtopic, can certainly have two or more points of explanation. These would be 1. and the 2. (or more) under the subtopic.

If the composition assignment is a multi-paragraph paper, then the outline to coordinate with the CONTROLLING STATEMENT is slightly different. The CONTROLLING STATEMENT should appear in its entirety at the top of the paper. Each KEY TERM is developed as a major topic or Roman numeral with the details or explanations becoming capital letters or Arabic numbers. (See Figure 6.)

Once the students have found out how the outline and the CONTROLLING STATEMENT coordinate and compliment each other, the outline becomes an invaluable tool to aid the student in preparing ideas for the rough draft.

THE ESSAY QUESTION

An area of written communication that teachers and students both tend to overlook is the essay question on a test. Many people feel threatened by a situation that requires an essay response when, in fact, there is no reason for this feeling if a method of organization is known.

The next step in the use of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT as a composition is the use of this same technique to answer an essay question. The IDEA and the VIEWPOINT are already provided in the question. (See Figure 7. and 8.)

Example:

1. Why did the southern states secede from the Union?
   The Southern States ⟶ IDEA
   seceded from the Union ⟶ VIEWPOINT
   because _____ } KEY TERMS
   _____
   _____

The best way to begin is to give the students several questions, and then have the students write CONTROLLING STATEMENTS from the questions. Because this exercise is not a test situation, students should be allowed to use a textbook to help them come up with the KEY TERMS. (See Figure 9.) A good classroom discussion can come from this to help the students understand from examples they share.

When the students have fully understood how the questions can be transformed into a CONTROLLING STATEMENT, a composition assignment should follow. This is an excellent way to bring other content areas into the situation. By providing two or three questions from each area (science, history, etc.), students see more of a relationship of essay answers to composition skills. When a student has several content questions from which to choose, he can work with an area with which he is familiar. Again, the use of a textbook will be more meaningful and allay "testing situation" fears. It should also be noted at this point that the outline should precede the rough draft as an invaluable organizational tool. (See Figure 10.)

As students continue to practice composition skills using a CONTROLLING STATEMENT, an essay question on an exam will become easier and less fearsome to the students.

THE TERM PAPER

A final culmination of the composition sequence that employs the CONTROLLING STATEMENT is the term paper. Many times a content area teacher will guide and direct the students as the subject area demands, but often that teacher cannot back up and provide basic composition skills for students to be able to complete a term paper. The students who have been taught the CONTROLLING STATEMENT are ready to actually begin the project. They know how to formulate the thesis (modified CONTROLLING STATEMENT); and they know how to prepare a preliminary outline to direct themselves in notetaking. (See Figure 11.)

A term paper is an easy class composition project if it is well organized and structured. Students should be guided in choosing an appropriate subject. The next step, a CONTROLLING STATEMENT, should be read and accepted by the teacher before students continue. After allowing time to browse through the subject, a preliminary outline -- a road map, if you choose -- should be carefully screened. Bibliography cards, note cards, and other such factors come next.

Because the students have been taught to write a multi-paragraph paper with a CONTROLLING STATEMENT, the modifications to a longer paper with organization as a key factor become much easier. Instruction in proper methods of footnoting and preparing a bibliography complete the final stages.

The term paper is an excellent way to involve other classes in a team effort or project. Students and teachers alike can pool their efforts to make the composition skills meaningful and useful outside the English/Language Arts classroom. After all, written communication's major purpose is not to please the English/Language Arts teacher. The major purpose should be to express oneself clearly in a written format that is well organized and easily understood.

EVALUATION

One of the most difficult areas in teaching composition is the grading of the papers in an objective manner rather than in a subjective manner. Grading a composition in two ways -- content and mechanics -- is one of the most common practices. This allows a student to fully express his ideas and thoughts even though he may have problems with the mechanics, whether it be spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or something else.

When grading a composition for content that has a CONTROLLING STATEMENT, the teacher has a certain amount of objectivity built in -- either the CONTROLLING STATEMENT is there in correct form or it is not. The details -- whether the assignment was a single paragraph, a multi-paragraph paper, or an essay response -- either support the CONTROLLING STATEMENT or they don't. The degree to which support is provided and an "A", "B", or "C" assigned, depends on the exact assignment, the individual student's ability, and that student's progress from the earliest writing to the later writing.

A method for keeping track of writing progress is to provide a file folder for each student. A student composition record (chart), a list of correction symbols, and student compositions are filed in this folder.

It is helpful to have students chart their graded compositions (See Figure 12.) as they are returned. These papers are then filed with the others so the students can see the progress, and the teacher can also see the progress. If the progress seems slow, the teacher may find an area of weakness that consistently appears in the student's writing (i.e., KEY TERM that overlaps or are unnecessarily vague). This, then, serves as a teaching tool in individual situations. All of this is best kept the file folder for each student.

The use of generally accepted abbreviations in correcting mechanical errors will allow the teacher to mark areas of difficulty quickly so that time is spent on comments relevant to structure and organization. (See Figure 13.)

The use of an objective sheet (See Figure 14.) throughout the composition sequence is an invaluable aid to marking progress of the student as well as for reference to other teachers. If the English/Language Arts department has agreed to use this general procedure for compositions, as a student moves from one teacher to another, his objective sheet can also be passed on, along with the compositions and the charts (the folder) from the previous teacher. The new teacher can then begin to sequentially teach the student from that point.

SAMPLE REPORT -- PROGRESS FORM

ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS Student's Name_____

Composition Objectives

I = Introduced
N = Needs work
M = Mastered at this level

The student will:

	I	N	M
1. Learn the parts of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT and call them by the correct name in discussion.			
2. Apply the use of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT to _____single paragraph compositions.			
3. Learn the use of a topic outline and its application to a single paragraph composition prior to writing the rough draft.			
4. Apply the use of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT and a topic outline to _____single paragraph compositions.			
5. Learn to use the CONTROLLING STATEMENT in _____multi-paragraph compositions.			
6. Learn the use of a topic outline and its application to a multi-paragraph composition prior to writing the rough draft.			
7. Apply the use of the CONTROLLING STATEMENT and a topic outline to _____multi-paragraph compositions.			
8. Learn to use the CONTROLLING STATEMENT to respond to an essay question as a composition assignment.			
9. Learn to adapt and use the CONTROLLING STATEMENT to write a term paper.			
10. Keep a record (chart) of composition progress with the intent of improving his writing skills by correcting or omitting previously made errors.			

COMMENTS:

Figure 14